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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

PM Olmert's November 27 Speech

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is likely to meet this week with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and PM Ehud Olmert. The radio quoted a senior US official in Washington as saying that the meetings will probably take place in Jerusalem and the PA on Thursday.

All media highlighted remarks made by Olmert in Sde Boker in the Negev on Monday that Israel will resume talks with Abbas and "evacuate ... any communities which were established [in the West Bank] " in order to provide continuity for a future Palestinian state. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert's speech elicited mixed reactions from the Palestinians. Media quoted Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh as saying that what is needed now are actions and not words. Leading media reported that the government coalition's Yisrael Beiteinu, as well as well as rightist factions, criticized Olmert's speech. Ha'aretz reported that State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack told Reuters that the US viewed Olmert's speech as constructive.

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI sources as saying on Monday that confidants of Olmert and Abbas are in "constant contact" trying to reach an agreement to expand the cease-fire in Gaza to include the West Bank. Israel Radio quoted Defense Minister Amir Peretz as saying that the cease-fire only applies to the Gaza Strip and that Israel's military activity will continue in the West Bank. The radio said that Egypt is applying pressure on Israel to put an end to its activity in the West Bank as well.

Israel Radio reported that FM Tzipi Livni attended a meeting in Finland with foreign ministers from Europe, the PA, Arab states, and Iran. The radio quoted Livni as saying on Monday at the conclusion of the meeting that durable peace can be achieved only if the international community assists Palestinian moderates and isolate extremist elements such as Hamas. The station quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Ali Abu al-Gheit as saying at the meeting that what is needed at this time is the stabilization of the cease-fire, followed by a prisoner-swap deal.

Ha'aretz reported that the IDF has altered its rules of engagement along the Israel-Gaza border after two Qassam rockets were fired from the northern Gaza Strip on Monday despite the cease-fire. The new rules allow troops to fire should they positively identify militants preparing to launch a rocket. Yediot reported that on Monday Olmert conveyed a message to Abbas, saying that there is a limit to Israel's self restraint regarding Qassam rocket fire. Maariv and The Jerusalem Post's web site reported that Israel has agreed to the posting in the Gaza Strip of around one thousand Jordanian soldiers of Palestinian origin from the Bader Division.

Yediot reported that over the past two years Meretz MK Haim Oron has held contacts with jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti in order to help Barghouti contribute to the PA's stability, prevent the strengthening of Hamas, and maintain open channels between Israel and the Palestinians. The newspaper wrote that Ariel Sharon and later Olmert have been fully cognizant of the Oron-Barghouti connection.

The Jerusalem Post reported that this week King Abdullah II of Jordan will separately host Abbas and Iraqi PM Nuri Al-Maliki, as

the latter will hold meetings with both Abdullah and President Bush.

Israel Radio cited The New York Times quoting a senior US official as saying that Hizbullah has trained Iraqi Shi'ite fighters in Lebanon.

Hatzofe cited a report by the American Consulate-General in Jerusalem that 70 percent of its FSN employees are Arabs and that less than 30 percent of its FSN staff are Jews. The newspaper noted that the Consulate-General was created in order to perpetuate the division of Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Post reported that US Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones hosted the Israel America Chamber of Commerce's annual awards dinner at which the guest of honor was Vice PM Shimon Peres. Peres, who was the keynote speaker, emphasized the importance of technological cooperation between Israel and the US, especially in the field of Homeland Security.

Leading media reported that Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh will leave for a foreign trip today that includes Egypt, Syria, and Iran. Yediot said that his trip would delay the formation of a Palestinian unity government and the release of abducted IDF soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit.

Maariv reported that a few days ago Hashem Salah, a senior Palestinian columnist at the London-based Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat, praised the speech that liberal Israeli novelist David Grossman delivered at the memorial rally for the late PM Yitzhak Rabin. Salah criticized Arab intellectuals and called on his readers to listen to voice of peaces within Israeli society. The Jerusalem Post reported that the UN Human Rights Council "continued its record of censuring only Israel" when it passed two anti-Israel resolutions in Geneva on Monday in which it declared the annexation of the Golan Heights was illegal and issued a broad condemnation of settlement activities. Other media reported on these developments. The Jerusalem Post quoted Yitzhak Levanon, Israel's Ambassador to the UN Institutions in Geneva, as saying in a telephone interview with the newspaper that events were proving that the new council is worse than the older one, the Human Rights Commission

Israel Radio, Hatzofe, and other media reported that on Monday in Jerusalem around 250 Israeli and Palestinian dentists attended the First Middle East Symposium on Dental Medicine, organized by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Al-Quds University. The Jerusalem Post reported that Kibbutz Metzger, which was the target of a brutal terrorist attack four years ago, is engaged in a joint organic farming venture project with the neighboring Palestinian village of Kafr Kaffin.

Ha'aretz reported that on Monday Israel's Islamic Movement rejected compromise proposals put forth by the Museum of Tolerance management regarding Muslim graves discovered at the museum's construction site in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Post reported that YES, Israel's satellite TV company, will broadcast Al Jazeera International-TV to its subscribers. The cable company HOT, YES's main Israeli competitor, may also begin airing the new channel in the coming weeks.

Channel 2-TV reported that a leak of radioactive material from the Dimona nuclear reactor into the Negev's "Small Crater" two years ago was not reported to the public.

Ha'aretz quoted AP as saying that the first privately owned English-language daily, The Palestine Times, was launched on Monday in the West Bank and Gaza, with its editors aiming to provide news about the region to English speakers abroad. The new publication's web site can be found at: www.times.ps.

Maariv reported that on Sunday US troops became suspicious of the funeral of David Avraham Shakuri, one of the last remaining Jews in Iraq, and started firing at the mourners.

Yediot reported that the Israeli Aharon Ciechanover, a Nobel prizewinner in Biology, has been admitted into the prestigious Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Ha'aretz reported that two disk jockeys, one Israeli and one Palestinian, are planning to put on a joint performance in London on December 21.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday members of the Knesset's Labor, Welfare, and Health Committee condemned the growing trend of Israelis visiting China for organ transplants.

PM Olmert's November 27 Speech:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: " After despairing and losing his way in the wake of the Lebanon war, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Monday presented a clear political strategy."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: "What is particularly worrying is that Hamas succeeded in securing calm in order to better entrench itself."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The one thing that is for sure is that this speech was a 'last chance' speech."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If the US, Europe and the Arab states all joined in encouraging the Palestinians to accept Israel's offer, there is a chance to finally reverse the trend of Palestinian radicalization."

Political parties correspondent Sima Kadmon wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In the ocean of violence and hatred there is indeed room to admire a leader's call for peace.... [But] actions are what will determine [reality] -- those of Olmert and of his non-partner."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in an editorial on page one of the nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "Two initiatives that Olmert adopted within two days turned Israel into a defeated state. The first was the cease-fire with the Palestinians and the second was his speech of defeat at Sde Boker, where he promised, once again, withdrawals and uprooted settlements."

Block Quotes:

I. "Clear Political Horizon"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/28): "After despairing and losing his way in the wake of the Lebanon War, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Monday presented a clear political strategy."

In the speech he gave at Sde Boker, at the state memorial ceremony for David Ben-Gurion, Olmert returned to the approach he exhibited when he formed his government: Withdrawal from the vast majority of the territories, the evacuation of most of the settlements and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state are essential for the long-term existence of the State of Israel. Or, as he has said in the past, they are the 'lifeline of Zionism.' In turning to the Palestinian people, Olmert proposed negotiating over the establishment of a Palestinian state with territorial contiguity in the West Bank, whose borders will be determined in accordance with the April 2004 "Bush letter" to Ariel Sharon.... This is the time to call on the Palestinians and their supporters in the Arab world to take up the Prime Minister's challenge and come to the negotiation table. It's true that Olmert's proposals are still far from the Palestinian demands. It's also true that Olmert was intentionally vague about the Jerusalem issue and other final-status questions. But that is the nature of diplomatic negotiation, which begins from positions that are far apart and tries to bring them closer. The alternative that the prime minister described -- renewed violence and many victims -- will only damage both sides and keep them away, once again, from a chance at normal life."

II. "A Tunnel at the End of the Light"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on

page one of Ha'aretz (11/28): " Hamas's strategy worked. In return for symbolic concessions to Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas -- and due mostly to its employment of force against Israel and the IDF's failure to put an end to the launching of Qassam rockets -- Hamas is reaping a major achievement. And anyone who is wondering whether the cease-fire will enable Hamas to become stronger should remember that following the group's electoral victory, Israel decided that it would not allow Hamas to consolidate its power unless it met a number of conditions. These conditions have not been met. The positive aspect of the cease-fire, for both sides, is the fact that Abbas, who seeks to resume diplomatic negotiations, succeeded in arranging it. However, Abbas is also trying to remove the economic boycott of the Gaza Strip and gain international recognition for a Palestinian government in which Hamas will be a leading partner. This can be viewed as a victory for Abbas, but it is clearly also a victory for Hamas.... What is particularly worrying is that Hamas succeeded in securing calm in order to better entrench itself."

III. "The Ball is in the Palestinian Court"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (11/28): "[On Monday Ehud Olmert] spoke about very significant concessions: the establishment of a Palestinian state with temporary borders... on condition that the terrorism stop, that the Palestinian government recognize Israel and previous agreements, and an interim arrangement towards a Palestinian state begins to take on concrete form and shape. Those are his tenets. That is the solution that he envisages. That is what he wants. The question is whether he believes in that as well. The chances of that scenario playing out are not high. There is no real partner with real capabilities on the other side. There are enough extremists on the other side who are capable of torpedoing and blowing up any incipient opportunity for sanity. Therefore, say Olmert's aides, the speech is either his peace speech or his war speech. The one thing that is for sure is that this speech was a 'last chance' speech. Because if after those explicitly made statements it becomes evident once again that we have nobody with whom to do business and no one with whom to make progress, legitimacy will be ours once again. Legitimacy for what? For a large-scale military operation in Gaza, for instance."

IV. "Echo Olmert's Offer"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/28): "On Monday, at the grave of David Ben-Gurion in Sde Boker, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert extended an olive branch to the Palestinians on behalf of the people of Israel. The Palestinians should know: The offer is real. Take it. Take yes for an answer. Olmert's offer is simple -- stop attacking us and we will release thousands of prisoners, give you a state and help you economically. What's the catch, Palestinians might ask. Well, the border between Israel and Palestine would have to be negotiated, and would not go exactly along the 1949 cease-fire lines. Palestinians would have to agree that their 'right of return' would be limited to the new Palestinian state itself (just as Jews may only 'return' to Israel), so there would be no option of destroying Israel by flooding it with Palestinians. That's about it.... The United States could play a critical role here as well. Though President George W. Bush's April 14, 2004, letter to Sharon was a good start, the key is to more openly and regularly endorse Israel's requirement that the Palestinians drop the 'right of return' to Israel, to push Arab states to do so as well and to lead a process of normalization with Israel by example. If the US, Europe and the Arab states all joined in encouraging the Palestinians to accept Israel's offer, there is a chance to finally reverse the trend of Palestinian radicalization. All of these external forces claim to support the two-state solution. Now Israel's support for this same solution is more explicit than ever. Unfortunately, unless the international community takes the opportunity to endorse and echo Israel's offer, the trend of Palestinian rejectionism will likely continue."

IV. "He Has Nothing to Lose"

Political parties correspondent Sima Kadmon wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/28): "It is not difficult to guess what brought Olmert to come up with a political plan now whose main parts he stated already in the past, though what

is new here is that it speaks of disengagement by agreement. What has brought Olmert to this today is precisely what brought Sharon to come up with the disengagement plan: his situation in the polls, the lack of political vision and hope that led to the increase of violence, frequent political plans and, cynics will say, the threat of proliferating investigations. But all this does not reduce the significance of the speech. Olmert extended a hand of peace to the Palestinian people. His courage cannot be scorned: the political plan he proposed completely contradicts the recommendations and the warnings of the security establishment. It could also endanger his [government] coalition.... In the ocean of violence and hatred there is indeed room to admire a leader's call for peace. But even confirmed optimists are permitted to take the Sde Boker speech with a grain of skepticism.... We have already heard a plethora of speeches. In the end, our reality will not be determined by speeches. Actions are what will determine it--those of Olmert and of his non-partner."

VI. "Olmert's Speech of Defeat"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in an editorial on page one of the nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (11/28): "Two initiatives that Olmert adopted within two days turned Israel into a defeated state. The first was the cease-fire with the Palestinians and the second was his speech of defeat at Sde Boker, where he promised, once again, withdrawals and uprooted settlements. The terror organizations can now rub their hands together in glee. Is it any wonder that they feel as if they were the ones who are dictating demands to Israel, such as an end to counter-terrorism activity in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]? They have been given a respite to reorganize without giving anything in return, Israel conceded victory, and the Prime Minister commits himself in advance to realize the Palestinian interests: an independent state, the destruction of Jewish settlements, the release of terrorists. And all that, as noted, without demanding from them even the most minimal commitment, barring that they temporarily hold their fire for as long as the situation suits them. They were not even required to release the kidnapped soldier in exchange for lifting the IDF pressure off of them."

JONES